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## SOME ASPECTS OF RABBINIC THEOLOGY.

### III.

THE visible kingdom may be viewed from two aspects, national and universal. In the following pages I will try to give the outlines of this idea as they are to be traced in Rabbinic literature.

"Before God created the world," we read in the chapters of R. Eliezer, "there was none but God and his great name. 'The great name is the tetragrammaton,'" the name expressive of his being, the "I am." All other names, or rather attributes, such as Lord, Almighty, Judge, Merciful, indicative of his relation to the world and its government, had naturally no meaning before the world was created. The act of creation again is a manifestation of God's holy will and goodness; but it requires a responsive goodness on the part of those whom he intends to create. "When the holy one, blessed be he, consulted the Torah as to the creation of the world, she answered, 'Master of the (future) world, if there be no host, over whom will the King reign, and if there be no peoples praising him, where is the glory of the King?' The Lord of the world heard the answer, and it pleased him."<sup>1</sup>

To effectuate this object, the angels already in existence did not suffice. "When God had created the world," one of the later Midrashim records, "he produced on the second day the angels with their natural inclination to do good, and an absolute inability to commit sin. On the following days he created the beasts with their exclusively animal

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter III. The thought of the world, and especially man, having been created for God's glory, is very common in Jewish literature. Cp. *Perek Kinyan Torah*, at the end; *Tanchuma Bereshit*, § 1.

desires. But he was pleased with neither of these extremes. If the angels follow my will, said God, it is only on account of their impotence to act in the opposite direction. I shall, therefore, create man who will be a combination of both angel and beast, so that he will be able to follow either the good or the evil inclination."<sup>1</sup> His evil deeds will place him below the level of the brutes, whilst his noble aspirations will raise him above the angels.

In short, it is not slaves, heaven-born though they may be, that can make the kingdom glorious. God wants to reign over free agents, and it is their obedience which he desires to obtain. Man becomes thus the centre of creation, for he is the only object in which the kingship could reveal itself in full manifestation. Hence it is, as it would seem, that on the sixth day, after God had finished all his work, that God became King over the world.<sup>2</sup>

Adam the first invites the whole creation over which he is master "to clothe God with majesty and strength," and to declare him King, and he and all beings join in the song, "The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty," which forms now the substance of the 93rd Psalm.<sup>3</sup> God can now rejoice in his world. This is the world inhabited by man, and when he viewed it, as it appeared before him in all its innocence and beauty, he exclaimed: "My world, O that thou wouldst always look as graceful as thou lookest now."

This state of gracefulness did not last long. The free agent abused his liberty, and sin came into the world, disfiguring both man and the scene of his activity. Rebellion against God was characteristic of the generations that follow. Their besetting sin, especially that of the generation of the Deluge, which had to be wiped out from the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the ס"מ"ק, § 53.

<sup>2</sup> See *Rosh Hashanah*, 31a, assuming, of course, that the words וּמֶלֶךְ עָלֵיהֶן on the second day came into the text by a clerical error. Cp. ר"ד, a.l. *Aboth d'R. Nathan*, Appendix 76b, and the Mishnah, ed. Lowe, 191a.

<sup>3</sup> Chapters of R. Eliezer, XI.

<sup>4</sup> *Genesis R.*, IX.

face of the earth, was that they said: "There is no judge in the world."<sup>1</sup> They were the reverse of the faithful of later generations, who proclaimed God's government and kingship in the world every day.<sup>2</sup> They maintained that the world was forsaken by God, and said unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job xxi. 14).<sup>3</sup> The name of God was profaned by transferring it to abominations (or idols), and violence and vice became the order of the day.<sup>4</sup> By these sins God was removed from the world in which he longed to fix his abode, and the reign of righteousness and justice ceased. The world was thus thrown into a chaotic state of darkness for twenty generations, from Adam to Abraham, all of them continuing to provoke God.<sup>5</sup> With Abraham the light returned,<sup>6</sup> for he was the first who called God master (אֲדֹנָי), a name which declares God to be the Ruler of the world, and concerned in the actions of men.<sup>7</sup> Abraham was also the first great missionary in the world, the friend of God, who makes him beloved by his creatures, and wins souls for him, bidding them, as he bade his children, to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and judgment.<sup>8</sup> It was by this activity that Abraham brought God again nearer to the world;<sup>9</sup> or, as the Rabbis express it in another passage, which I have already had occasion to quote: Before Abraham made God known to his creatures he was only the God or the King of the heavens, but since Abraham came (and commenced his proselytising activity) he became also the God and the King of the earth;<sup>10</sup> Jacob is also supposed by the Rabbis to have

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<sup>1</sup> *Aboth d'R. Nathan*, 47b, and parallels.

<sup>2</sup> See *Midrash Tillim*, B., 11b.

<sup>3</sup> See *Synhedrin*, 108a.

<sup>4</sup> *Mechilta*, 67b. See also *Pseudo-Jonathan*, Gen. IV. 26.

<sup>5</sup> See *Aboth*, V. 1, and commentaries.

<sup>6</sup> *Genesis R.*, III., § 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Berachoth*, 7b. See מֹדֵר"שׁ to the passage.

<sup>8</sup> See *Siphre*, 73b, and parallels.

<sup>9</sup> *Pesikta B.*, 1b, and *Pesikta R.*, 18b.

<sup>10</sup> *Siphre*, 131b, where the word מֶלֶךְ occurs.

taught his children before his death the ways of God whereupon they received the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>1</sup> Hence the patriarchs (as models and propagators of righteousness) became, as I have mentioned above, the very throne of God, his kingdom being based upon mankind's knowledge of him, and their realisation of his nearness.<sup>2</sup>

But the throne of God is not secure as long as the recognition of the kingship is only the possession of a few individuals. At the very time when the patriarch was teaching righteousness, there were the entire communities of Sodom and Gomorrah committed to idolatry and the basest vices,<sup>3</sup> whilst in the age of Moses Pharaoh said: "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?"<sup>4</sup> The kingship is therefore uncertain until there exists a whole people "which knows God," sanctified unto his name, and devoted to the proclamation of his unity.<sup>5</sup> "If my people," God says to the angels, "decline to proclaim me as King upon earth, my kingdom ceases also in heaven." Hence Israel says unto God, "Though thou wast from eternity the same ere the world was created, and the same since the world has been created, yet thy throne was not established and thou wast not known; but in the hour when we stood by the Red Sea, and recited a song before thee, thy kingdom became firmly established and thy throne was firmly set."<sup>6</sup> The establishment of the kingdom is indicated in the eighteenth verse of the song, where it is said, "The Lord shall be King for ever and ever." But even more vital proofs of their readiness to enter into the kingdom Israel gave on the day of "the glorious meeting" on Mount Sinai, when they answered in one voice: "All that the

<sup>1</sup> *Numbers R.*, II., § 8. See also *Gen. R.*, and parallels.

<sup>2</sup> See *JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW*, VI., p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> *Synhedrin*, 108a, and parallels.

<sup>4</sup> See Maimonides' *M. T.* ה' פ"א הלכות עכו"ם, etc., which seems to be a paraphrase of some Midrash.

<sup>5</sup> See *Exod. R.* xxiii.

<sup>6</sup> Midrash to Song of Songs MS.

Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient" <sup>1</sup> (Exod. xxiv. 7). This unconditional surrender to the will of God invested Israel, according to the Rabbis, with a special beauty and grace.<sup>2</sup> And by the manifestation of the knowledge of God through the act of the revelation the world resumes its native gracefulness, which makes it again heaven-like, whilst God finds more delight in men than in angels.<sup>3</sup>

There is a remarkable passage in the *Mechilta*, in which Israel is strongly censured because in the song at the Red Sea, instead of using the present tense, ה' מֶלֶךְ, "God is King," they said ה' יִמְלֹךְ, "God shall be King," thus deferring the establishment of the kingdom to an indefinite future.<sup>4</sup> Israel had accordingly some sort of foreboding of the evil times to come, a foreboding which was amply justified by the course of history. Israel soon rebelled against the kingdom. There was the rebellious act of the Golden Calf, which took place on the very spot where the kingdom was proclaimed, and which was followed by other acts of rebellion against God.<sup>5</sup> The sons of Samuel were called *Bene Belial*—men who threw off the yoke of God<sup>6</sup> and denied the kingdom of heaven.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> *Pesikta B.*, 17a.

<sup>2</sup> See *Midrash Agadah*, ed. B., 171a. Cp. the Targum to Song of Songs, vii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> See *Exod. R.*, LI., § 8, and parallels.

<sup>4</sup> See *Mechilta*, 44a, in the name of R. Jose of Galilee. The text in the editions is corrupt. In the *Midrash Haggadol* it runs:—ה' יִמְלֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד • ר' יוֹסִי אוֹמֵר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' מֶלֶךְ עוֹלָם וְעַד לֹא שִׁלְטָה בָּהֶם אוֹמָה וּמַלְכוּת אֵלֹהֵי יִמְלֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד לְעִתִּיד לְבוֹא • מִפְּנֵי מָה כִּי בָא סוֹס פְּרָעָה מִלְּמַד שֶׁאֵף פְּרָעָה בְּכָלֹל • וַיֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם אֵת מִי הֵימָּן • עֲלֵיהֶם שָׁב • אֲבָל עִמָּךְ וְצֵאן מִרְעִיתְךָ וְנִחַלְתָּךְ בְּנֵי אֲבִרָהֶם אוֹהֲבֵךְ זֶרַע יִצְחָק יִדְרֵךְ מִשְׁפַּחַת יַעֲקֹב בְּכוֹרֶךְ • גִּפְן שֶׁהִסְעָת מִמִּצְרַיִם וְכִנָּה שֶׁנִּטְעָה יְמִינְךָ • וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בִּיבִשָּׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם Cp. Targum Onkelos to this verse, who seems to have had the same difficulty as R. Jose, which Nachmanides did not apparently appreciate, unless he overlooked the passage from the *Mechilta*.

<sup>5</sup> See *Numb. R.*, VII., § 2.

<sup>6</sup> See *Siphre*, 93b.

<sup>7</sup> See *Yalikut Samuel*, § 86. The marginal reference to *Torath Kohanim*

division of the ten tribes under Jeroboam was also regarded as a rebellion against the kingdom of God. The Rabbis seem to have had a tradition that the original reading in 2 Samuel xx. 1 was *אִישׁ לִאלֹהָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל*, "Every man to his gods, O Israel."<sup>1</sup> Even the princes of Judah at a later time "broke the yoke of the Holy One, blessed be he, and took upon themselves the yoke of the King of Flesh and Blood." The phrase, "broke" or "removed" the yoke, is not uncommon in Rabbinic literature, and has a theological meaning. The passage just cited refers probably to some deification of Roman emperors by Jewish apostates, and not exactly to a political revolt.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, notwithstanding all these relapses, one great end was achieved, and this was, that there existed a whole people who did once select God as their King. Over the people as a whole, as already hinted, God asserts his right to maintain his kingdom. Thus the Rabbis interpret Ezekiel xx. 33, "Without your consent and against you will I (God) be King over you"; and when the elders of Israel remonstrate, "We are now among the Gentiles, and have therefore no reason for not throwing off the yoke of his kingdom," the Holy One answers, "This shall not come to pass, for I will send my prophets, who will lead you back under my wings."<sup>3</sup> The right of possession is thus enforced by an inner process, the prophets being a part of the people; and so there will always be among them a remnant which will remain true to their mission of preaching the kingdom. The remnant is naturally small in

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(39*d*) refers only to the first lines of the passage, which Schöttgen (1149) confused. See *Kohleth Rabbah*, I., § 18.

<sup>1</sup> The rebellion of the Belial Sheba, the son of Bichri, is only a prelude to that effected by Jeroboam. See *Midrash Shemuel B.*, c. 14, § 4, and notes, and 39*a*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Aboth d'R. Nathan*, c. 20. See, however, Bacher's *Agada der Tannaiten*, I., 58, note 1, and the reference there to Weiss. Cp. the *Beth Talmud*, II. 333-34.

<sup>3</sup> See *Torath Kohanim*, 112*b*. Cp. *Synhedrin*, 105*a*, and parallels.

number, but is sufficient to keep the idea of the kingdom alive. "God saw," say the Rabbis, "that the righteous were sparse; he therefore planted them in (or distributed them over) all generations, as it is said in 1 Samuel i. 8, 'For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he has set the world upon them.'" The pillars, according to the Rabbinical explanation, are the righteous, who, by the fact of their being devoted to the Lord, form the foundation of the spiritual world.<sup>1</sup>

I will now try to sum up in some clearer way the results to which the preceding sentences, mostly consisting of Rabbinical quotations, may lead us. We learn first that the kingdom of God is in *this world*. In the next world, if we understand by it the heavens, or any other sphere where angels and ethereal souls dwell, there is no object in the kingdom. The term, "Kingdom of Heaven," must therefore be taken in the sense in which heaven is equivalent to God, but not locally, as if the kingdom were located there. The term מַלְכוּת שְׁדֵי in the Prayer-book,<sup>2</sup> the kingdom of the Almighty, may be safely regarded as a synonym of מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם.

This kingdom again is established on earth by man's consciousness that God is near to him, whilst nearness of God to man means the knowledge of God's ways to do righteousness and judgment, in other words, the sense of duty and responsibility to the heavenly King who is concerned in and superintends our actions. "The hill of the Lord," and "the tabernacle of God" in the Psalms, in which only the workers of righteousness and the pure-hearted shall abide, are kingdoms of God in miniature.

The idea of the kingdom is accordingly ethical, not eschatological, and it was in this sense that the Rabbis considered the patriarchs and the prophets as the preachers

<sup>1</sup> *Yoma*, 38b.

<sup>2</sup> Beginning על בן נקוה (p. 77 of Rev. S. Singer's Edition).



of the kingdom. It is not even identical with the law or the Torah. Why do we read, ask the Rabbis, first the *Shema* (i.e., Deut. vi. 4-9), and afterwards the section Deut. xi. 13, commencing with the words: "And it shall come to pass if ye will hearken diligently unto my commandments." This is done, say the Rabbis, to the end that we may receive upon ourselves first the yoke of the kingdom and afterwards the yoke of the commandments.<sup>1</sup> The law is thus only a necessary consequence of the kingdom, but it is not identical with it. Another remarkable passage, in which the kingdom is distinguished from the Torah, is the following, alluding to Zech. ix. 9: "'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, . . . behold thy King is coming unto thee. . . .' God says to Israel: 'Ye righteous of the world, the words of the Torah are important for me; ye were attached to the Torah, but did not hope for my kingdom. I take an oath that with regard to those who hope for my kingdom I shall myself bear witness for their good. . . . These are the mourners over Zion who are humble in spirit, who hear their offence and answer not, and never claim merit for themselves.'" Lector Friedmann, in his commentary on the *Pesikta*, perceives in this very obscure passage the emphatic expression of the importance of the kingdom, which is more universal than the words of the Torah; the latter having only the aim of preparing mankind for the kingdom.<sup>2</sup> But from another passage it would seem that Israel could derive the same lesson from the Torah itself, if they would only read it rightly. I refer to Siphre in Deut. xxxii. 29, where we read: "Had Israel looked properly into the words of the Torah which were revealed to them, no nation would have ever gained dominion over them. And

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<sup>1</sup> *Berachoth*, 13a.

<sup>2</sup> See *Pesikta Rabbathi*, 159a, text and notes (especially note 12). There are, however, very grave doubts as to the age and character of all these *Messianic Pesiktoth*. See Friedmann's interesting note, *ibid.*, p. 164a and b, though he defends their genuineness.

what did she (the Torah) say unto them? Receive upon yourselves the yoke of the kingdom of my name; outweigh each other in the fear of heaven, and let your conduct be mutual loving-kindness."<sup>1</sup> The conditions of the kingdom are thus, mainly at least, ethical: The fear of God and the love of one's neighbour. Nor again is the kingdom of God political. The patriarchs in the mind of the Rabbis did not figure as worldly princes, but as teachers of the kingdom. The idea of theocracy in opposition to any other form of government was quite foreign to the Rabbis. There is not the slightest hint in the whole Rabbinic literature that the Rabbis gave any preference to a hierarchy with an ecclesiastical head who pretends to be the vice-regent of God, to a secular prince who derives his authority from the divine right of his dynasty. Every authority, according to the creed of the Rabbis, was appointed by heaven;<sup>2</sup> but they had also the sad experience that each in its turn rebelled against heaven. The high priests, Menelaus and Alcimus, were just as wicked and as ready to betray their nation and their God as the laymen, Herod and Archelaus, who owed their throne to Roman machinations.

If, then, the kingdom of God was thus originally intended to be in the midst of men and for men at large (as represented by Adam), if its first preachers were like Abraham ex-heathens, who addressed themselves to heathens, if again the essence of their preaching was righteousness and judgment, and if, lastly, the kingdom does not mean a hierarchy, but any form of government conducted on the principles of righteousness, judgment,

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<sup>1</sup> *Siphre*, 138a. Perhaps we ought to read שמי instead of שמי. Cp. also תר"א, c. 28: "And thus said the holy one, blessed be he, My beloved children, do I miss anything which you could give me? I want nothing from you but that you love each other, respect each other, and that no sin or ugly thing be found among you."

<sup>2</sup> See *Berachoth*, 58a. With regard to Rome in particular, see *Abodah Zarah*, 17a, שאומה זו המליכה מן השמים.

and charitableness, then we may safely maintain that the kingdom of God, as taught by Judaism in one of its aspects, is universal in its aims.

But, on the other hand, it cannot be doubted that the idea of the kingdom is occasionally so strongly connected with the Israelites as to appear almost inseparable from them. This is its national aspect. The Israelites, as we have seen, are the people, who, by their glorious acts on the Red Sea, and especially by their readiness on Mount Sinai to receive the yoke of the kingdom, became the very pillars of the throne, with whom even the angels have to reckon. To add here another passage of the same nature, I will quote the saying of R. Simon, who expresses the idea in very bold language. Speaking of the supports of the world, and Israel's part in them, he says: "As long as Israel is united into one league (that is, making bold front against any heresy denying the unity or the supremacy of God), the kingdom in heaven is maintained by them; whilst Israel's falling off from God shakes the throne to its very foundation in heaven.<sup>1</sup>" Jerusalem, which the Prophet (Jer. iii. 17) called the throne of the Lord, becomes identified with it; and Amalek, who destroyed the holy city, becomes guilty of rebellion against God and his kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Therefore neither the throne of God nor his holy name is perfect (that is to say, not fully revealed) as long as the children of the Amalekites exist in the world.<sup>3</sup> And just as Israel are the bearers of the name of God, so the Amalekites are the representatives of idolatry and every base thing antagonistic to God, so that R. Eleazer of Modyim thinks that the existence of the one necessarily involves the destruction of the other. "When will the name of the Amalekites be wiped out? he exclaims. Not before both the idols and their worshippers cease to exist, when God will be alone in the world and his kingdom established

<sup>1</sup> See *Midrash Shemuel*, V., § 11, and references. Cp. Bacher, II. 140, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Pesikta B.*, 28a.

<sup>3</sup> *Pesikta F.*, 51a, and parallels.

for ever and ever.”<sup>1</sup> These passages, to which many more of a similar nature might be added, are the more calculated to turn the kingdom of heaven into a kingdom of Israel, when we remember that Amalek is only another name for his ancestor Esau, who is the father of Edom, who is but a prototype for Rome. With this kingdom, represented in Jewish literature by the fourth beast of the vision of Daniel,<sup>2</sup> Israel according to the Rabbis is at deadly feud, a feud which began before its ancestors even perceived that the light of the world is perpetually carried on by their descendants, and will only be brought to an end with history itself.<sup>3</sup> The contest over the birthright is indicative of the struggle for supremacy between Israel and Rome. It would even seem as if Israel despairs of asserting the claims of his acquired birthright, and concedes this world to Esau. “‘Two worlds there are,’ Jacob says unto Esau, ‘this world and the world to come. In this world there is eating and drinking, but in the next world there are the righteous, who with crowns on their heads revel in the glory of the divine presence. Choose as first-born the world which pleases thee.’ Esau chose this world.”<sup>4</sup> Jacob’s promise to join his brother at Seir meant that meeting in the distant future, when the Messiah of Israel will appear and the Holy One will make his kingdom shine forth over Israel, as it is said (Obadiah i. 21): “And saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”<sup>5</sup> Thus the kingdom of heaven stands in opposition to the kingdom of Rome, and becomes connected with the kingdom of Israel, and it is in conformity with this sentiment that a Rabbi, picturing the glorious spring, in which the budding of Israel’s redemption will first be perceived, exclaims: “The time has arrived when the reign of the wicked will break down and Israel will be redeemed;

<sup>1</sup> *Mechilta*, 56a and b.

<sup>2</sup> See *Lev. R.*, XII., and parallels.

<sup>3</sup> *Genesis R.*, LXI., §§ 6, 7 and 9.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from a Midrash in a Parma MS. Cp. XIX., ת"דבז.

<sup>5</sup> *Genesis R.*, LXXVIII., and parallels.

the time is come for the extermination of the kingdom of wickedness ; the time is come for revelation of the kingdom of heaven, and the voice of the Messiah is heard in our land.”<sup>1</sup>

This is only a specimen of dozens of interpretations of the same nature, round which a whole world of myths and legend grew up, in which the chiliastic element, with all its excesses, was strongly emphasised. I cannot enter here into the details of those legends. They fluctuate and change with the great historical events and the varying influences by which they were suggested.<sup>2</sup> But there are also fixed elements in them which are to be found in the Rabbinic literature of almost every age and date. These fixed elements are :—

1. The faith that the Messiah will restore the Kingdom of Israel, which under his sceptre will extend over the whole world.
2. The notion that a last terrible battle will take place with the enemies of God (or of Israel), who will strive against the establishment of the kingdom, and who will finally be destroyed.
3. The conviction that it will be an age of both material as well as spiritual happiness for all those who are included in the kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

Now even Christianity, in which the Messianic element is so predominant, and in which, according to the best authorities, the chiliastic element is so early “that it may be questioned whether it ought not to be regarded as a Christian dogma,” dispensed with it as early as the fourth

<sup>1</sup> See *Pesikta B.*, 50a, and *Pesikta F.*, 75a, text and notes.

<sup>2</sup> Principal Drummond's book, *The Jewish Messiah*, is still the best work on the subject. A thorough re-examination of all the materials as to their real Jewish character and their age would be the more desirable, as since the appearance of this work many MSS. and Midrashim have been discovered. See Güdemann, *Monatsschrift*, 1893, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> Whether the Kingdom of the Messiah is identical with the Kingdom of God, or only a preparation for it, is not quite clear. In one of the versions of the well-known Midrash of the Ten Kings after the Messiah, the kingdom comes back to its first master, that is, God, who was the first King after the creation of the world. See Chapters of R. Eliezer, XI.

century. Judaism, which has never shown a great tendency to convert folklore into dogma, whilst, on the other hand, it has felt a strong reluctance to assume authority in matters falling within the province of prophecy, had neither the necessity nor the opportunity of disowning these chiliastic details. When the Church became triumphant, and "the profession of the Christian faith was attended with ease and honour," the doctors of Christianity could afford to spiritualise or to explain away the idea of the millennium, from which the early martyrs derived so much comfort and strength. But Judaism had then to enter on a new and terrible era of persecution and suffering, which gave a fresh impulse to the creation of new Messianic apocalypses or to the spinning out of the old ones.

The process of spiritualisation, as it was partly undertaken by Maimonides, and others, had therefore to be postponed to a later period. The theological consequences of this delay were that, in the meantime, the two ideas of the Kingdom of Heaven, over which God reigns, and the Kingdom of Israel, in which the Messiah holds the sceptre, became confused with each other.

But this delay was not quite an unmixed evil. To a certain extent I even feel grateful for it. The worst that can be said of this confusion is, that it has both narrowed, and to some extent even materialised, the notion of the kingdom. On the other hand, however, it also contributed towards investing it with that amount of substance and reality which are most necessary, if an idea is not to become meaningless and lifeless. It is just this danger to which ideas are exposed in the process of their spiritualisation. That "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," is a truth of which Judaism, which did depart very often from the letter, was as conscious as any other religion. Zerachya ben Shealtiel, in his Commentary to Job ii. 14,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Published in the *תקנת אנשי*, a collection of commentaries to Job.

goes even as far as to say, "Should I explain this chapter according to its letter I should be a heretic, because I would have to make such concessions to Satan's powers which are inconsistent with the belief in the Unity. I shall therefore interpret it according to the spirit of philosophy." But, unfortunately, there is also an evil spirit which sometimes possesses itself of an idea and reduces it to a mere phantasm. The history of theology is greatly haunted by these unclean spirits. The best guard against them is to provide the idea with some definiteness and reality before we permit ourselves to look out for the spirit.

This was the service rendered by the connection of the Kingdom of Israel with the Kingdom of God. In the first place, it fixed the kingdom *in this world*. It had of course to be deferred to some indefinite period, but still its *locale* remained our globe, not unknown regions in another world. It was extended from the individual to a whole nation, thus making the idea of the kingdom visible and tangible. The whole nation, with all its institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, becomes part and parcel of the Kingdom of God.

By this fact, it is true, the Kingdom of God becomes greatly nationalised. But even in this narrowed sense, Israel is only the depository of the kingdom, not the exclusive possessor of it. The idea of the kingdom is the palladium of the nation. According to some, it is the secret which has come down to them from the patriarchs;<sup>1</sup> according to others, the holy mystery of the angels overheard by Moses, which Israel continually proclaims.<sup>2</sup> It has to be emphasised in every prayer and benediction,<sup>3</sup> whilst the main distinction of the most solemn prayers of the year on the New Year's Day consists in a detailed proclamation of the Kingdom of God in all stages of

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<sup>1</sup> See *Siphre*, 72b, and the very instructive notes by the editor.

<sup>2</sup> *Deut. R.*, II.

<sup>3</sup> See *Berachoth*, 12a.

history, past, present, and future. "Before we appeal to his mercy," teach the Rabbis, "and before we pray for redemption, we must first make him King over us."<sup>1</sup> We must also remember that Israel is not a nation in the common sense of the word. To the Rabbis, at least, it is not a nation by virtue of race or of certain peculiar political combinations. As R. Saadyah expressed it, *כי אומתנו כי אם בתורתיה* ("This nation is only a nation by reason of its Torah");<sup>2</sup> and if we could imagine for a moment Israel giving up its allegiance to God, the Rabbis would be the first to sign its death-warrant as a nation. The prophecy (Isaiah xlv. 5), "Another shall subscribe with his hands unto the Lord," means, according to the Rabbis, the sinners who return unto him from their evil ways, whilst the words, "And surname himself by the name of Israel," are explained to be proselytes who leave the heathen world and join Israel.<sup>3</sup> It is then by these means of penitence and proselytism that the Kingdom of Heaven, even in its connection with Israel, expands into the universal kingdom to which sinners and Gentiles are invited.

The antagonism between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Rome, which is brought about by the connection of the former with that of Israel, suggests also a most important truth: *Bad Government is incompatible with the Kingdom of God.* As I have already said, it is not the *form* of the Roman Government to which objection was taken, but its methods of administration and its oppressive rule. It is true that they tried "to render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's and unto God the things that were God's." Thus they interpreted the words in Ecclesiastes vii. 2: "I counsel thee, keep the king's commandments and that in regard of the oath of God," in the following way: "I take an oath from you, not to rebel against the (Roman)

<sup>1</sup> See *Siphre*, 19b, and *Rosh Hhashanah*, 16a.

<sup>2</sup> *אמונות ודעות*, III.

<sup>3</sup> *Mechilta*, 95b, and parallels.



Government, even if its decrees against you should be most oppressive; for you have to keep the king's commands. But if you are bidden to deny God and give up the Torah, then obey no more." And they proceed to illustrate it by the example of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who are made to say to Nebuchadnezzar: "Thou art our king in matters concerning duties and taxes, but in things divine thy authority ceases, and therefore 'we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast put up.'"<sup>1</sup> But compromises forced upon them by the political circumstances of the time must not be regarded as desirable ideals or real doctrine. Apart from the question as to the exact definition of things falling within the respective provinces of Cæsar and of God—a question which, after eighteen hundred years' discussion, is still unsettled—there can be little doubt that the Rabbis looked with dismay upon a government which derived its authority from the deification of might, whereof the emperor was the incarnate principle. "Edom recognises no superior authority, saying, 'Whom have I in heaven.'"<sup>2</sup> It represents the iron (we would say blood and iron), a metal which was excluded from the tabernacle, as the abode of the divine peace,<sup>3</sup> whilst their king of flesh and blood, whom they flatter in their ovations as being mighty, wise, powerful, merciful, just, and faithful, has not a single one of all these virtues, and is even the very reverse of what they imply."<sup>4</sup>

But besides these theological differences the Rabbis held the Roman Government to be thoroughly corrupt in its administration; Esau preaches justice and practises violence. Their judges commit the very crimes for which they condemn others. They pretend to punish crime, but are reconciled to it by bribery. Their motives are selfish,

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<sup>1</sup> See *Tanchuma* 71, § 10, and *Lev. R.*, XXXIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Lev. R.*, XIII.

<sup>3</sup> See *Exod. R.*, XXXV. 7.

*Mechilta*, 35a.

never drawing men near to them, except in their own interest and for their own advantage. As soon as they see a man in a state of prosperity, they devise means how to possess themselves of his goods. In a word, Esau is rapacious and violent, especially the procurators sent out to the provinces, where they rob and murder, and when they return to Rome pretend to feed the poor with the money they have collected.<sup>1</sup> Such a government was, according to the Rabbis, incompatible with the Kingdom of Heaven, and therefore the mission of Israel was to destroy it.<sup>2</sup>

The third essential addition made to the Kingdom of God by its connection with the Kingdom of Israel is, as I have said, the feature of material happiness. The Rabbis pictured it in gorgeous colours: The rivers will flow with wine and honey, the trees will grow bread and delicacies, whilst in certain districts springs will break forth which will prove cures for all sorts of diseases. Altogether, disease and suffering will cease, and those who come into the kingdom with bodily defects, such as blindness, deafness, and other blemishes, will be healed. Men will multiply in a way not at all agreeable to the laws of political economy, and will enjoy a very long life, if they will die at all. War will, of course, disappear, and warriors will look upon their weapons as a reproach and an offence. Even the rapacious beasts will lose their powers of doing injury, and will become peaceful and harmless.<sup>3</sup> Such are

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<sup>1</sup> See *Lev. R.*, *ibid.*; *Aboth*, II. 3; *Exod. R.*, XXXI.; *Pesikta B.*, 95b. Interesting is a passage in Mommsen's *History of Rome*, IV., which shows that the Rabbis did not greatly exaggerate the cruelty of the Roman Government. "Any one who desires," says our greatest historian of Rome, "to fathom the depths to which men can sink in the criminal infliction, and in the no less criminal endurance of an inconceivable injustice, may gather together from the criminal records of this period the wrongs which Roman grandees could perpetrate, and Greeks, Syrians, and Phœnicians could suffer." Cp. Joel's *Blicke*, I., 109. How far matters improved under the emperors, at least with regard to the Jews, is still a question.

<sup>2</sup> *Berachoth*, 17a. See *Ḍ"ḡ*, a.l.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, *Kethuboth*, 111a; *Shabboth*, 63a; *Gen. R.*, XII.; *Exod. R.*, XII.

the details in which the Rabbis indulge in their descriptions of the blissful times to come. I need not dwell upon them. There is much in them which is distasteful and childish. Still, when we look at the underlying idea, we shall find that this idea is not without its truth. The Kingdom of God is inconsistent with a state of social misery, engendered through poverty and want. Not that Judaism looked upon poverty, as some author has suggested, as a moral vice. Nothing can be a greater mistake. The Rabbis were themselves mostly recruited from the artisan and labouring classes, and of some we know that they lived in the greatest want. Certain Rabbis have even maintained that there is no quality becoming Israel more than poverty, for it is a means of spiritual purification.<sup>1</sup> Still, they did not hide from themselves the terrible fact that abject poverty has its great demoralising dangers. It is one of the three things which makes man transgress the law of his Maker.<sup>2</sup>

But even if poverty would not have this effect, it would be excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven, as involving pain and suffering. The poor man, they hold, is dead as an influence, and his whole life, depending upon his fellows, is a perpetual passing through the tortures of hell.<sup>3</sup> But it is a graceful world which God has created, and it must not be disfigured by misery and suffering. It must return to its perfect state when the visible kingdom is established. As we shall see in a future essay, Judaism was not wanting in theories, idealising suffering and trying to reconcile man with its existence. But, on the other hand, it did not recognise a chasm between flesh and spirit, the material and the spiritual world, so as to abandon the one for the sake of the other. They are both the creatures of God, the body as well as the soul, and hence both the objects of his salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Chagiga*, 9b.

<sup>2</sup> *Erubin*, 41b.

<sup>3</sup> *Nedarim*, 7b, and *Berachoth*, 6b.

In a remarkable book, containing the conversations of a Jewish Mystic of the present century, R. Nachman of Braslaw, there a question is put by one of his disciples to this effect: "Why did God, in whom everything originates, create the quality of scepticism?" The Master's answer was: "That thou mayest not let the poor starve, putting them off with the joys of the next world, instead of supplying them with food."

I too venture to maintain with the mystic that a good dose of materialism is necessary for religion that we may not starve the world. It was by this that Judaism was preserved from the mistake of crying inward peace, when actually there was no peace; of speaking of inward liberty, when in truth this spiritual but spurious liberty only served as a means for persuading man to renounce his liberty altogether, confining the Kingdom of God to a particular institution and handing over the world to the devil.

This is not the place to enter into the Charity-system of the Rabbis, or to enlarge upon the measures taken by them so as to make charity superfluous. But having touched upon the subject of poverty, a few general remarks will not be out of place. In that brilliant Gospel of the second half of the nineteenth century, which is known under the title of *Ecce Homo*, we meet the following statement: "The ideal of the economist, the ideal of the Old Testament writers, does not appear to be Christ's. He feeds the poor, but it is not his great object to bring about a state of things in which the poorest shall be sure of a meal." I am happy to say that this was included in the ideal of the Rabbis. They were not satisfied with feeding the poor. Not only did they make the authorities of every community responsible for the poor, and would even stigmatise them as murderers if their negligence should lead to starvation and death;<sup>1</sup> but their great ideal was not to allow man to be poor, not to allow him to come down into the depths of

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<sup>1</sup> See *Sotah*, 38*b*, and *Jerushalmi*, *ibid.*, 23*d*.

poverty. They say: "Try to prevent it by teaching him a trade, or by occupying him in your house as a servant, or make him work with you as your partner."<sup>1</sup> Try all methods before you permit him to become an object of charity, which must degrade him, tender as our dealings with him may be.

Hence their violent protests against any sort of money speculation which must result in increasing poverty. "Thou lendest him money on the security of his estate with the object of joining his field to thine, his house to thine, and thou flatterest thyself to become the heir of the land; be sure of a truth that many houses will be desolate."<sup>2</sup> Those again who increase the price of food by artificial means, who give false measure, who lend on usury, and keep back the corn from the market, are classed by the Rabbis with the blasphemers and hypocrites, and God will never forget their works.<sup>3</sup>

To the employers of workmen again they say: "This poor man ascends the highest scaffoldings, climbs the highest trees. For what does he expose himself to such dangers, if not for the purpose of earning his living? Be careful, therefore, not to oppress him in his wages, for it means his very life."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, they relieved the workman from reciting certain prayers when they interfered with his duty to his master.<sup>5</sup>

From this consideration for the employer and the employed a whole set of laws emanate which try to regulate their mutual relations and duties. How far they would satisfy the modern economist I am unable to say. In general I should think that, excellent as they may have

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<sup>1</sup> See *Torath Kohanim*, 109b, and Maimonides' *Mishnah Torah*, הלכות מתנות עניים פ"י ה"ז וה"י. See also the older commentaries on *Aboth*, I., 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Pesichta of Lament. R.*, 22, on Is. v. 8.

<sup>3</sup> See *Aboth d'R. Nathan*, 43b; *Baba Bathra*, 90a.

<sup>4</sup> See *Siphre*, 123b, and *B. Mezia*, 123b, and *Berachoth*, 16a.

<sup>5</sup> *Berachoth*, 17a.

been for their own times, they would not quite answer to our altered conditions and ever varying problems. But this need not prevent us from perceiving, in any efforts to diminish poverty, a divine work to which they also contributed their share. For if the disappearance of poverty and suffering is a condition of the Kingdom of the Messiah, or in other words, of the Kingdom of God, all wise social legislation in this respect must help towards its advent.

S. SCHECHTER.

